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ABSTRACT

Although sex discrimination has been widespread in many areas of public school education, in no area has it been so blatant as in athletics. Much of the support for the posture that competitive athletics was morally and physically bad for girls came from the physical education profession itself and from the women in the profession. Misconceptions about anatomy and physiology and about the strength and endurance of females also played a part in fostering the idea that girls and young women were to be protected from vigorous activity. Discussion of the evils of competitive athletics and the undesirability of competition for girls is now irrelevant, however, since Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits persons from being excluded from educational programs and activities by reason of sex. So many changes have already occurred that Title IX will only accelerate changes that have already begun. Elementary physical education has made great advances in the past decade. Children are being taught early to be comfortable with their bodies--to be agile and dexterous. In many areas of the country, high school girls now have opportunities to play in up to eight or ten sports at the varsity level. Generally, competitive play is organized through the high school activities associations, and there is little coeducational competition so far. It seems obvious that the time has come for enlarged programs for girls' sports and for informed parents to support them. (RC)

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Equal Opportunity for Girls in Athletics

By MARJORIE BLAUFARB

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By MARJORIE BLAUFARB
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Although sex discrimination has been widespread in many areas of public school education, in no area has it been so blatant as in athletics. Until recently, the education hierarchy from top to bottom has agreed that exposure to competitive athletics was good for boys but morally and physically bad for girls. Why? On what has this strange dichotomy been based?

Primarily on myth, it now appears, because, until the last few years, there has been little or no objective, documented research. Even now, there is still very little, considering the greatly increased interest in girls' sports.

Much of the support for the traditional posture came from the physical education profession itself and, indeed, from the women in the profession. The profession's attitude was an amalgam of many elements. First, of course, it reflected the prevailing mores in the community. During the period that high school and collegiate sports for boys and men were developing to their present state, social thinking put women into the home, into nurturant roles, and into places where they could be protected. Along with everything else, they were to be protected from the rough and tumble of boisterous play, from the pressures of competition and the striving to win of competitive sports.

This was so much the case, says Rosalind Cassidy, professor emeritus of physical education at the University of California, Los Angeles, that in the 1920's when girls from colleges in California gath-

ered for a "play day," they were scrambled together before being divided into teams so that it was impossible for one college to win.

The same social pressures dictated that girls who enjoyed physical activity were tomboys, an undesirable role they were expected to outgrow by the time they reached adolescence. Women physical education majors were taught to overcompensate for the fact that they engaged in physical activity by displaying an almost exaggerated femininity. They were to speak softly, dress modestly, and present a most refined appearance.

Misconceptions about anatomy and physiology and about the strength and endurance females were capable of developing and displaying also played their part in fostering the idea that girls and young women were to be protected from vigorous activity. Fifty or more years ago, girls played quarter-court basketball, because they were thought unable to sustain the effort for even half-court play. Later rules changes, however, daringly called for half-court basketball for girls, and now they play a full-court game, with a five-person team and with no visible ill effects.

There were fears that young women's childbearing functions would be harmed if they engaged in athletics or undertook a rigorous conditioning program similar to that approved for even young boys. It was also feared that such conditioning would make girls develop bulging muscles and a masculine appearance.

The fears regarding harm to childbearing functions appear to be groundless, since the uterus and ovaries have been placed in a well-protected place in the female anatomy. One would image that the males, whose genitalia have been

placed in a much more exposed position, are the ones to be wary.

Researchers doing studies on women in sports have helped dispel the notion that girls and women need special protection when engaging in sports. During the convention of the American Society for Testing and Materials in June 1974, a symposium, "Women in Sport—A Focus on the Injury Problem," dealt with some of these myths. Dorothy V. Harris, director, Center for Women and Sport, the Pennsylvania State University at University Park, and Thomas E. Shaffer, M.D., University Health Services, the Ohio State University at Columbus, agreed that their research and observation lead them to conclude that the conditioning necessary for high level sports performance is not injurious to young women. Furthermore, male hormones, not vigorous physical activity, are what produce big bones and a masculine appearance. Female hormones dictate that young women are more rounded and have smaller bones than men, whether or not they engage in a vigorous conditioning program.

With respect to the injury problem, proper training, conditioning, care, and supervision are necessary, but Dr. Harris, Dr. Shaffer, and others agreed that young women need not be muffled up in heavy, padded clothing while engaged in sports. Nature gives them good protection, and additional padding should be considered carefully and used sparingly.

Dr. Shaffer said that the Ohio State University Medical Service had kept a tabulation of injuries reported by women athletes during the school year and that gymnasts reported the highest incidence of injury—more injuries than those who participated in what would

appear to be rougher activities, such as field hockey or soccer.

In a paper presented at the national convention of the American Alliance [formerly Association] for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (AAHPER) in April 1974, Allan J. Ryan, M.D., stated that there is no evidence that sports in and of themselves invoke any significant changes in the menstrual cycle, either favorable or unfavorable, in most women.

Discussion of the evils of competitive athletics and of the undesirability of competition for girls appears to be futile right now because Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits persons from being excluded from educational programs and activities by reason of sex. So girls and young women must now have the opportunity to participate in school sports programs and to take part at the highly skilled competitive level if they wish to do so. And many of them do.

Since the regulation to effectuate Title IX, which was proposed earlier this year, calls for all curriculum offerings, including physical education, to be coeducational, separation of boys' and girls' physical education programs will have to cease. The requirement that physical education classes be coeducational is likely to be the aspect of Title IX that will be hardest for physical educators to adjust to. An administrative pattern that called for a boys' side and a girls' side for physical education classes, commencing in middle school or junior high, has been an article of faith with a majority of the profession.

But so many changes have already been made, judging from what I have seen and heard in

school systems from California to Rhode Island, that Title IX will only accelerate changes that have already begun.

It is difficult to consider women in athletics in public schools apart from the whole picture of athletics and physical education. Although obviously not the same, the two areas are interdependent, and many of the same personnel are involved.

Elementary physical education has made great advances in the past decade. Starting early, children are being taught to be comfortable with their bodies—to be agile and dexterous. Activities for even the youngest child teach good eye-hand coordination, sure-handedness, and sure-footedness. Recent research, which has included the examination of slides of athletes in action in a variety of sports, has demonstrated that some basic movements carry over into all sports. Now we shall hope to see this knowledge put to use as both girls and boys are taught to be athletes—not just boys, as was formerly the case.

It will no longer be possible to exclude girls from some games and activities to which boys are exposed at the fifth grade on the grounds that the activities are too vigorous. Educators must begin to recognize that if such activities are too rough for girls, they are probably too rough for all children.

A position statement issued by the AAHPER Elementary School Physical Education Commission in 1970 recognized that competition in the elementary school is a "vital and forceful educational tool." But the same statement also recognized that "to be beneficial, competition must be success-oriented for all children and relevant

to the school program." Implementation of the Title IX regulation will almost certainly expose elementary schoolgirls to more coeducational competition in the school setting.

An article in the February 1974 issue of the *Journal of Health, Physical Education, Recreation* reports on a survey of interschool and intramural sports for girls and boys in middle schools and junior high schools. The writers state: "As a whole, the girls' programs included more variety in activities and emphasized the social rather than the competitive aspect of the sport." This comment reinforces a theory I have that competitive sports have not been introduced for fifth to seventh grade girls because teachers had an unconscious prejudice against exposing girls to situations where they learned to be aggressive, rather than because they feared that the girls would be hurt in such rigorous sports.

In many areas of the country, high school girls now have opportunities to play in up to eight or 10 sports at the varsity level. Generally, competitive play is organized through the high school activities associations, and there is little coeducational competition so far. But in certain sports, schedules are arranged so that teams of both sexes travel together and play simultaneously, alternately, or one after the other. This is most frequently the case in track and field meets, swimming meets, and tennis and golf tournaments.

The regulation to effectuate Title IX allows discretion as to whether teams are coeducational or not. Since only the exceptional girl could make it on a boys' team, the majority of systems will probably continue single-sex teams. The idea is to provide opportunities

for a maximum number of youngsters to participate, and the single-sex team seems best for that purpose.

In the Houston School District, girls are involved in six competitive sports locally; four, on a statewide basis. In response to a survey, parents gave overwhelming approval to girls' participation in a competitive athletic program. Participation by students is enthusiastic, and although no large sums of money are available, the school board is constantly increasing funds available for girls' sports. Boys' sports have not suffered, according to some observers.

Several school districts in northeast Ohio have a long-standing pattern of varsity sports for girls. They participate in eight or even 10 sports with apparent community approval. As these programs have developed with local support, there has been no outcry that the girls' program was eclipsing the boys' sports activities.

Iowa has had a girls' athletic league for more than 50 years. Wayne Cooley, the executive director of this league, says that girls have a better chance for good competition with Iowa's pattern of two leagues, one for girls and one for boys. For the most part, the same gate fees are charged for girls' and boys' events, although when admission prices have been increased, those for girls' events have been increased before those for boys' events. Television coverage and television fees for girls' events are more than double those for boys'.

Girls' and boys' teams are often scheduled to play at the same place on the same day so that they may travel together. The team that is having a winning season gets the choice place on the program, so the boys may lead off in some

years and the girls, in other years.

Cooley believes that while less money is being made on boys' sports now, properly administered girls' sports can in fact be a new form of revenue. Total annual revenues for the program sponsored by the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union doubled between 1969 and 1974.

Administrators faced by requests to upgrade the high school girls' sports program have most often offered lack of funds as an excuse for not doing so. Since funding for athletic programs for boys in public schools varies, no panacea exists to solve the financial problems related to a good girls' program.

One big city director claims that upgrading programs for girls has helped with the funding for the boys' programs in his district. Others from smaller districts say that they have had to rework their budgets, bring out old uniforms, and make all kinds of economies in order to support an adequate girls' sports program. But they do it. And they are proud of their girl athletes at the high school level.

It seems obvious that the time has come for enlarged programs for girls' sports and that informed parents support them. □